

ALLAN MILLER HOUSE

**7121 South Paxton Avenue
Chicago, Illinois**

**Preliminary Staff Summary of Information
Submitted to the
Commission on Chicago Landmarks
July, 1992**

ALLAN MILLER HOUSE

**7121 South Paxton Avenue
Chicago, Illinois**

CONSTRUCTED: 1915

ARCHITECT: John S. Van Bergen

The Allan Miller House in Chicago's South Shore neighborhood is a signal example of Prairie residential architecture. A two-story frame house, it is distinctive among neighboring bungalows and other traditionally designed houses. Beyond its visual distinction on South Paxton Avenue, however, the Miller House is part of a design heritage important not only to Chicago but of international significance.

The Prairie School was a revolutionary movement in architecture which, though regionally based in some respects, has had a major impact throughout the world. The style is most closely associated with Frank Lloyd Wright, yet Wright's contributions to the design movement were supported and enriched by a loosely-knit band of disciples, many of whom trained with Wright. John Van Bergen, the architect of the Miller House, is widely recognized as one of the most important contributors to the movement. The Miller House is particularly important as the only known work by Van Bergen still remaining in Chicago.

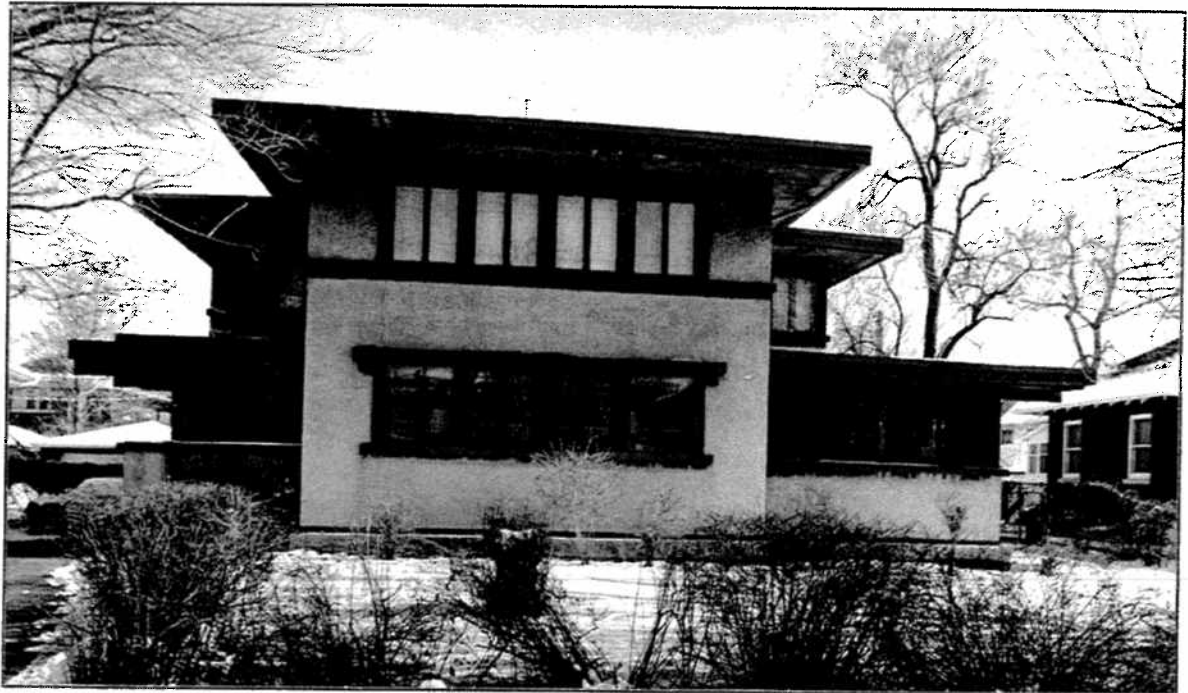
As significant as the original Miller House design and architect are, its state of preservation sets this residence apart from most of its celebrated contemporaries. Despite the interest and attention given to the Prairie style as an important twentieth-century movement, few of the houses survive in a condition by which the scope of the design characteristics can be appreciated. Created as organic, unified compositions, the impact of Prairie residences was particularly dependent on the careful integration of all aspects of design: plan, site, space, elevation, materials, finishes, texture. In most extant Prairie houses, remodelings and incremental changes over decades have resulted in the removal of original features and the obscuring of original finishes and textures under coats of paint and varnish. Probably no other Prairie School house in Chicago remains in as pristine condition as the Allan Miller House, providing direct physical documentation of this important design movement.

Residential Development in South Shore

Construction of the Miller House in 1915 occurred at the onset of a community-wide building boom in the South Shore neighborhood. Although white settlers began moving to the area in the 1850s, settlement through the community was sparse through the 1890s. Small residential enclaves, including Parkside (71st and Stony Island), Essex (73rd and Kimbark), Bryn Mawr (71st and Jeffrey), South Shore (71st and Yates), and Windsor Park (75th and Exchange) were built up around the stops of the Illinois Central Railroad main line and its South Chicago branch during the 1880s. All of these communities were part of the Hyde Park Township which was annexed to Chicago in 1889.

The socio-economic characteristics of these neighborhoods varied considerably, but two social institutions had a decidedly affluent character. The Windsor Park Golf Club, located between 75th and 79th, east of Yates Boulevard, and the Washington Park Race Track, founded in 1884 at 63rd and Cottage Grove, provided diversion for the leisure class and helped to establish an identity for the community at large that would be continued further with the founding of the South Shore Country Club in 1905. Any kind of comprehensive settlement, however, were not forthcoming during the 1890s despite the expectations generated by the location of the 1893 Columbian Exposition immediately north of South Shore in Jackson Park.

The bold geometric exterior expression of the interior spaces of the Miller House is in stark contrast to the traditional architectural forms otherwise present on this block of South Paxton Avenue. (*Raymond T. Tatum, photographer, for the Chicago Historic Resources Survey*)



With the population of the city growing and the social characteristics of neighborhoods changing, South Shore began to see the first hints of extensive real estate development in the first decade of the century. According to *Residential Development* (volume 1 of the *Chicago Land Use Survey*, 1942), there was more construction in South Shore from 1895 through 1914 than ever previously, but the development was still widely dispersed. The Jackson Park Highlands, a high-grade residential subdivision located between 67th and 71st streets, Creiger Avenue, and Jeffrey Boulevard, begun in 1905, was just one of many areas being built up. By far the greatest building activity, however, took place from 1915 to 1924, a fact reflected in the construction dates of the homes in the 7100-block of Paxton Avenue where the Miller House is located.

Little is known about Allan Miller, who commissioned the house. In 1911 and 1912 he worked as an independent advertising agent and resided on the South Side. Miller joined an engraving and advertising publishing firm, Meyer & Both Company, in 1914, serving as director and secretary. He was a South Shore resident prior to the construction of his Paxton Avenue house, and resided at the Van Bergen designed house from 1916 through 1923.

The Allan Miller House as an Illustration of Prairie School Principles

The Allan Miller House is the product of a distinctive body of thought that reoriented American architecture a century ago and continues as a palpable influence in architecture today. The Prairie movement was an intuitive response by designers to the stultifying character of architectural design as it had evolved through the nineteenth century. The core concept of the movement was that of creating organic, aesthetically and functionally unified structures from inorganic parts, and to imbue structures with a sense of dynamism. The philosophy was nurtured by Louis Sullivan in the expressionism of his late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century architecture. A group of second-generation architects, including Frank Lloyd Wright, George Elmslie, and Robert Spencer, used Sullivan's personal theory of architecture as a point of departure for their designs. Although there are distinguishing characteristics in the works of each of these designers, it is important to note that they all shared an antipathy for historical references in architecture. They believed that reliance on previous designs implied pre-ordained notions of what a building should look like. These architects and their successors, including John Van Bergen, looked at each job as a unique set of problems--client needs, budget, materials, site, and other factors--requiring unique solutions.

Consistent with their emphasis on designing structures responding to the particular circumstances of each job, Prairie architects developed plans and elevations as an organic whole. Unlike more traditional houses where plans conformed to the traditional notions



The rear (east) elevation of the Miller House demonstrates the manner in which Prairie architects "broke the box" of traditional architectural forms. The placement of windows at the corners of the house is in contrast to the conventional expectations of corners as solids. Note also how the direct expression of the stair hall breaks the flat wall plane. (*Raymond T. Tatum, photographer*)

of exterior design--typically, a stylized box-like structure, with essentially four walls and a roof--prairie houses "broke the box," creating staggered geometric volumes responding to the spatial continuity within. The plan spread out as a somewhat linear flow of interior space, which was reflected on the outside of the house as a group of boxes. To this day, organic design remains an important element of progressive design. In a recent article on Bruce Goff and his proteges, writer Mark Alden Branch elaborated on the meaning of the term "organic" in its architectural context:

. . . the most inclusive description of organic architecture says simply that it is a process of design where a building is generated from within: the requirements of program, together with (usually) some kind of geometry-based system and an indefinable spark of creativity, determine the overall form. The external appearance of the building, instead of being a separate concern, is the natural result of the process. ("A Breed Apart," *Progressive Architecture*, June, 1992, p. 70).

The Miller House has a simple, free-flowing plan which is reflected in the exterior massing. From the street, the house consists of the main two-story cubic section, housing the princi-

pal public rooms, and ancillary units for the entrance and porch and additional rooms at the rear. The linear orientation of the subsidiary sections to the main volume reflects the spatial flow within.

In that the room arrangement of the Miller House parallels the street, its composition has an overall horizontal movement. This linear quality of Prairie compositions gave rise to the imagery of the Midwest landscape that is so often associated with the work of Wright and his associates. In 1908, Wright wrote "In the Cause of Architecture," an article that outlined the basic tenets of the Prairie movement and in which Wright drew out the metaphor of the prairie in relation to the new architecture:

A building should appear to grow easily from its site and be shaped to harmonize with its surroundings if nature is manifest there, and if not try to make it as quiet, substantial, and organic as she would have been were the opportunity hers.

We of the Middle West are living on the prairie. The prairie has a beauty of its own and we should recognize and accentuate the natural beauty, its quiet level. Hence, gently sloping roofs, low proportions, quiet sky lines, suppressed heavy-set chimneys, and sheltering overhangs, low terraces and out-reaching walls sequestering private gardens. (*Architectural Record*, March, 1908.)

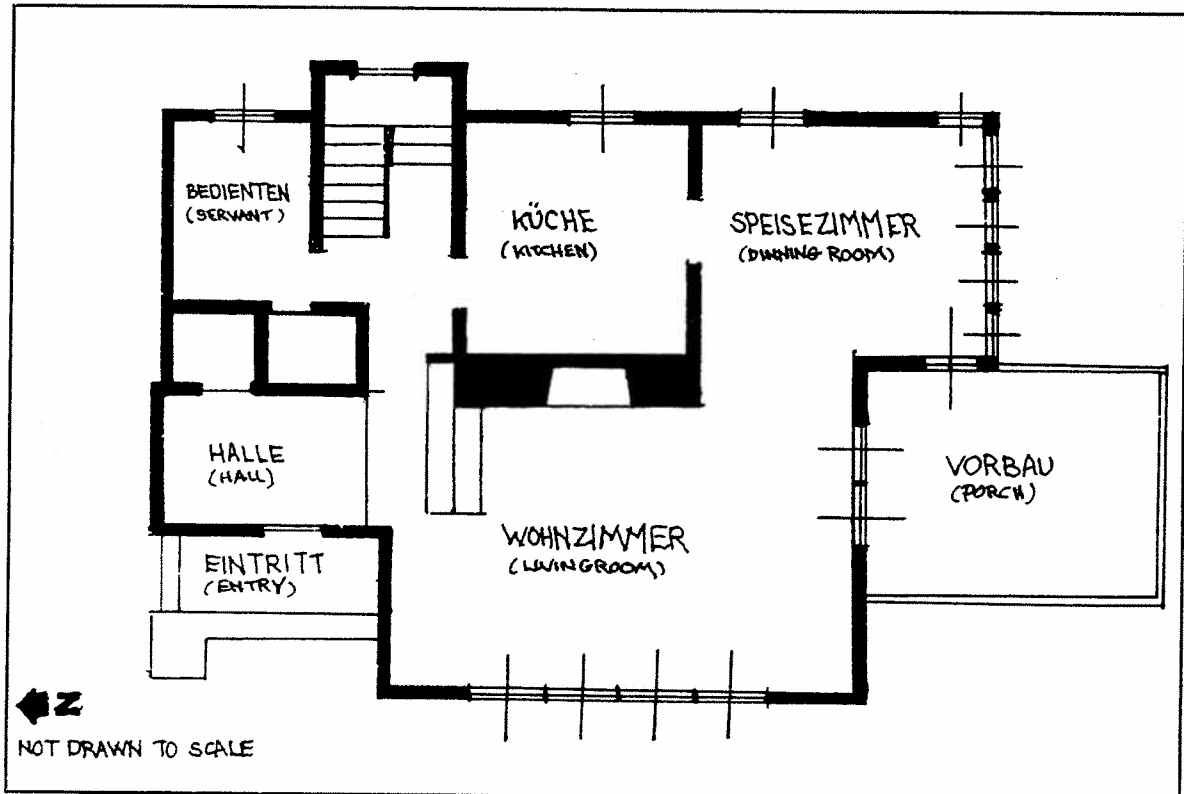
The repose of the Miller House design, with its flat roof and deep eaves and bands of windows accentuating the horizontal line of the prairie, epitomizes the principles Wright espoused. It is important to note, however, that while aspects of the architecture resulted in a distinct aesthetic effect, the effect was not the single goal of the design. The *functional* characteristics of components such as roof eaves and bands of windows were equally important for the manner in which they enhanced the quality of light and air circulation within the houses. The great achievement of the Prairie School lay in the merging of highly functional and livable houses with original artistic designs exhibiting extraordinary craftsmanship.

The detailing of Prairie houses, on the interior and exterior, was an extension of the organic design process. Prairie architects stressed the use of materials in a manner consistent with their nature. Toward that end, brick and stucco and wood were used in ways that enhanced their color, texture, grain, and similar characteristics. For the Prairie architects, materials themselves had an inherent beauty to be emphasized. They eschewed the superficial use of incongruous materials. Wood, for example, was used as flat boards, without profiles, and was stained to emphasize the grain, underscoring the nature of the board itself. Plaster, rather than being used passively as a medium to simply paint, was enriched by the introduction of pigment for color and sand or crushed quartz for texture.

Like other Prairie houses, the Miller House has no applied ornament. Rather, the design relies on the intrinsic visual interest of its cubic massing and of its clean, spartan lines. Simple, unbroken wall surfaces, modulated only by the strong horizontal window groupings and the roof line, rise from the concrete foundation. The house is surfaced with umber-tinted, mottled stucco, in furtherance of the earth-toned color schemes favored by Prairie architects. In contrast to the rough stucco finish of the walls, the eaves and the porch and entry ceilings have a finer, pebbledash stucco texture. The exterior rough-cut, pine woodwork, currently painted, probably was stained originally.

Although the exterior configuration perfectly reflects the interior plan, the openness of the floor plan of the Miller House, or any Prairie house, is still a surprise, because of the bold departure from traditional configurations where rooms were arranged as a series of connected compartments. In Prairie houses the public rooms--the entry hall, living room and dining room--are laid out, typically in an L- or T-shape around a central fireplace, to provide a continuous flow of space. The open layout is a result of the manner by which rooms are offset from each other--to give each room its own identity--but which are linked through the use of wide openings. According to architectural historian Grant Manson, spatial continuity was a result of "the subdivision of interior space by suggestion rather than

The ground-floor plan of the Miller House is similar to other Prairie houses where traditional definitions of rooms are dissolved and replaced with individually defined spaces that are nonetheless spatially interrelated.



partition." The open floor plan represents one of the most salient and successful aspects of this design genre.

The Miller ground floor is straightforward, but its simplicity belies the subtlety of the spatial manipulation present in the best Prairie School works. The entrance is on the north side of the lot and, in the manner of other Prairie houses, is somewhat indirect. Commentators have suggested that such obscure entrances reinforced the domestic values of Prairie designs by heightening the privacy of the family at home and its seclusion from the rest of the community. Whether such was the goal of Van Bergen or his contemporaries, the Miller House displays a subtle sequence of spaces between the front walk and the interior. Deeply recessed, the front door is not visible from the street. On the path between the street and the house, the visitor can only see the front door once he is within the shadows of the eaves, creating a sense of architectural drama upon approaching the entrance alcove.

The front hall is on the same level as the sidewalk, and the principal rooms are one step up. From the entrance hall, a built-in bookcase, approximately five feet high, forms a low wall between the hall and living room. The plan of the principal rooms is compact, and is readily discernible. The living and dining rooms are offset in an L-shaped configuration, with the brick wall of the living room fireplace as its axis. With French doors off of both the living and dining rooms, the open-air porch on the south side of the house extends these areas appreciably. In plan, movement through the house follows a counterclockwise movement; only the kitchen, stairway, and a maid's bedroom, all grouped in the northeast quadrant of the house, are separated from the spatial circulation. On the second floor there are four bedrooms and a bathroom, laid out in conventional manner, opening from a central hallway.

The ground-floor plan of the Miller house is a variation on a design by Frank Lloyd Wright, entitled "A Fireproof House for \$5,000" published in the *Ladies' Home Journal* of April, 1907. Intended as an inexpensive solution to the demand for housing at the time, the *Journal* plan called for a two-story cubic volume, the ground floor of which placed the living and dining rooms at right angles to each other, with a fireplace at the pivot. The compact-yet-spacious plan was the most succinct exposition of the Prairie School idiom, and was a major influence on mainline Prairie architects as well as more generalized practitioners. H. Allen Brooks, one of the principal chroniclers of the Prairie movement, has commented on the significance of Wright's plan:

To the crude, ungainly box Wright had imparted style. He flattened the roof, strengthened the cornice, ordered the window openings, and married the building to the ground. He vanquished the compartmentalized interior by integrating the living and dining rooms as single L-shaped space which pivoted around a central fireplace. To gain apparent breadth

A Fireproof House for \$5000

Estimated to Cost That Amount in Chicago, and Designed Especially for The Journal

By Frank Lloyd Wright



One Side of the House, Showing the Trellised Extension

THE cost of building has increased nearly forty per cent. in the past six years. The thirty-five-hundred-dollar wooden house of six years ago would cost nearly five thousand dollars now; so at the present time it would seem that five thousand dollars ought to represent a low enough cost standard, if the result be permanent and the cost of maintenance lessened.

Changing industrial conditions have brought reinforced concrete construction within the reach of the average home-maker. The maximum strength peculiar to the nature of both concrete and steel is in this system utilized with great economy. A structure of this type is more enduring than if carved intact from solid stone, for it is not only a masonry monolith but interlaced with steel fibres as well. Insulated with an impervious non-conducting inner coating it is damp-proof; it is, too, warmer than a wooden house in winter and cooler in summer.

The plan for a small house of this type, submitted here, is the result of a process of elimination due to much experience in planning the inexpensive house. What remains seems sufficiently complete and the ensemble an improvement over the usual cut-up, overtrimmed boxes doing duty in this class, wherein architecture is a matter of "millwork" and the "features" are apt to peel.

As an added grace in summer foliage and flowers are arranged for as a decorative feature of the design, the only ornamentation. In winter the building is well proportioned and complete without them.

NO ATTIC, no "butler's pantry," no back stairway have been planned; they would be unnecessarily cumbersome in this scheme, which is trimmed to the last ounce of the superfluous. A closet on the level of the stair landing takes care of trunks and suit-cases, and a dry, well-lighted basement storeroom cares for whatever doesn't classify in the various closets.

The open kitchen, with pantry conveniences built into it, is more pleasant and as useful as the complement of kitchen, kitchen pantry and "butler's pantry." Access to the stairs from the kitchen is sufficiently private at all times, and the front door may be easily reached from the kitchen without passing through the living-room.

The walls, floors and roof of this house are a monolithic casting, formed in the usual manner by means of wooden false work, the chimney at the centre carrying, like a huge post, the central load of floor and roof construction. Floors and roof are reinforced concrete slabs approximately five inches thick if gravel concrete is used. The roof slab overhangs to protect the walls from sun and the top is waterproofed with a tar and gravel roofing pitched to drain to a downspout located in the chimney-flue, where it is not likely to freeze. To afford further protection to the second-story rooms from the heat of the sun a false ceiling is provided of plastered metal lath hanging eight inches below the bottom of the roof slab, leaving a circulating air space above, exhausted to the large open space in the centre of the chimney. In summer this air space is fed by the openings noted beneath the eaves outside. These openings may be closed in winter by a simple device reached from the second-story windows.

All the interior partitions are of metal lath plastered both sides, or of three-inch tile set upon the floor slabs after the reinforced concrete construction is complete. After coating the inside surfaces of the outside concrete walls with a non-conducting paint, or lining them with a plaster-board, the whole is plastered two coats with a rough sand finish.

The floor surfaces are finished smooth with wooden strip inlaid for fastening floor coverings, or at additional cost noted they may be finished over a rough structural concrete with a half-inch thick dressing of magnesite mixed with sawdust, which renders them less hard

and cold to the touch, and when waxed presents a very agreeable surface in any color.

The interior is trimmed with light wood strips nailed to small, porous terra-cotta blocks, which are set into the forms at the proper points before the forms are filled with the concrete.

IN THE composition of the concrete for the outside walls only finely-screened bird's-eye gravel is used with cement enough added to fill the voids. This mixture is put into the boxes quite dry and tamped. When the forms are removed the outside is washed with a solution of hydrochloric acid, which cuts the cement from the outer face of the pebbles, and the whole surface glistens like a piece of gray granite. This treatment insures uniformity of color, and if the wooden forms have been properly made of narrow flooring smoothed on the side toward the concrete and oiled, the surface throughout should be smooth and even without unsightly seams.

The house has been designed four sides alike in order to simplify the making of these forms, and so that, if necessary, forms made for one side may serve for all four.

The windows are casement type, swinging outward. The screens or storm sash are fitted within as a part of the window trim, swinging in

when the windows need cleaning. All windows may be operated independently of screens by a mechanical device accessible from within at all times and closing beneath the window-sills. The outer sash might at no very great additional expense be made of metal. The trellis over the entrance might give place to a concrete roof slab similar to the roof of the house, should a covered porch be a necessity.

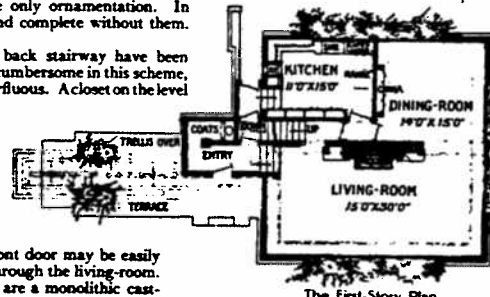
The house may be placed with either the living-room front or the terrace front to the street, as indicated in the exterior perspectives.

Estimate of Cost

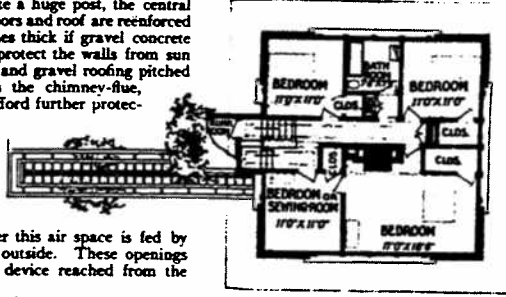
Concrete construction, masonry and plastering	\$3100
Carpentry, millwork, sash-doors and screens, labor and trimming	1100
Plumbing and furnace	460
Wiring	70
Painting and glazing	160
Hardware	90
	<hr/> \$4980

If magnesite floors are used add 370

\$5300



The First-Story Plan



The Second-Story

NOTE—The architect, Mr. Frank Lloyd Wright, Forest and Chicago Avenues, Oak Park, Illinois, has agreed to furnish plans, specifications, details and complete service for ten per cent. of the cost of the house. Where plans, specifications and details only are wanted his charge will be seven and a half per cent. of the cost, provided the purchaser agrees to employ a competent superintendent and to execute the drawings without changes, unless agreed upon in advance with the architect. As the estimate is based on Chicago prices it is well to remember that in different parts of the country the figures will vary, according to local conditions.

The plan of the Miller House is derived from "A Fireproof House for \$5,000," an article written in 1907 by Frank Lloyd Wright for the *Ladies' Home Journal*. This compact-yet-spacious room arrangement was one of the most succinct expressions of Prairie design, and was a major influence on subsequent Prairie School works.

and horizontality he extended the entrance as a low, trellised terrace at the side. The design--in its traditional forms or as revised by Wright--had many virtues. It was compact and economical to maintain and build. It required little land and its orientation was readily changed. And its appeal was broadened by identity with prevailing forms. For Drummond, Bentley, Purcell, Elmslie, and others it served as inspiration; blended into the vernacular, it served the speculative builder. (*The Prairie School: Frank Lloyd Wright and His Midwest Contemporaries*, p. 126).

Responding to the opportunities of a wide lot (75 feet x 125 feet) and a client of apparently sufficient means, Van Bergen took Wright's basic plan and created a highly individual design. Although a large lot by city standards, the Miller site was not as expansive as many suburban sites where plans for Prairie houses reached their fullest development. The compact arrangement of the *Journal* scheme was therefore a logical point of departure for the design of a residence on a constricted site.

The Miller House was substantially larger than that of the *Journal* design--with larger rooms; four large bedrooms, including a dressing room; a maid's room; and a porch--and, as such, required extensive alteration of the *Journal* plan. The Miller plan retains the principal two-story cubic volume of Wright's arrangement, but the rooms extend out from this zone to the one-story porch wing to the south and the two-story section to the rear, or east. Van Bergen was by no means limited to the *Journal* plan; in contemporaneous projects, Van Bergen employed a variety of sophisticated plans. The fact that he here employed a variation of possibly the most influential Prairie design only underscores the significance of the Miller House as a representative example of the Prairie movement.

The house has an abundance of custom detailing. All of the birch woodwork--including the living room bookcase and bench, dining room buffet and china hutch, ceiling fixtures, doors, casings, baseboards, and other trim--survives with its original staining. A band of horizontal woodwork, approximately two feet below the ceiling, and vertical strip, at the corners, visually define the ground-floor rooms. The massive fireplace wall is the focal point of the living room. It is strongly expressed in grey Roman brick with a monolithic stone slab and blocks defining the hearth opening. A shelf above the fireplace ties in with the horizontal wood banding around the room, adding visual interest to the setting.

The walls are a sand-float stucco finish, sand or fine-grained pebbles having been added to the plaster for texture. The one significant change to the interior has been the painting of the walls. The original paint sequence, a deep rust wainscot and a calcimine (water soluble) gold above, is still discernable in the closets.

The quality of the light in Prairie structures, as demonstrated by the Miller House, was especially important. In terms of artificial light, the two ceiling fixtures are early examples

of the use of reflected light. Generous numbers of windows, especially the bands across the living and dining rooms and the bedrooms, as well as the screened porch, provide ample natural light and air. Most of the window openings are filled with pairs of casements. The glass is detailed with zinc coming in simple geometric patterns. Functionally, with their ornamental "grillwork," the windows provide a degree of privacy; aesthetically, the windows form a simple rhythmic arrangement of straight lines and squares.

Few structures in Chicago are as strongly linked to the Prairie School and its core group of architects as the Miller House is. Probably none is in more original condition. Standing virtually unaltered from its appearance when it was built, the Miller House has been recognized by the National Register of Historic Places as a representative Prairie School work by an important architect of that movement.

John Van Bergen

The Allan Miller House is the only known extant work in Chicago by noted Prairie School architect John Shellette Van Bergen (1885-1969), a curious circumstance given the fact that Van Bergen maintained an architectural practice in the Chicago area for over four decades. Regarded as one of the most important architects of the Prairie School, Van Bergen was a third-generation participant in Chicago's creative architectural movements at the turn of the century, deriving much of his approach to architecture from previously established practitioners such as Louis H. Sullivan and Sullivan's former disciple, Frank Lloyd Wright. With a large portion of his training occurring with his employment in Wright's studio, Van Bergen in turn established his own practice in 1911, carrying his personal vision of this architectural legacy well into the twentieth century.

The majority of Van Bergen's work was executed in the suburbs, but one of the best and most intact examples is seen in the Allan Miller House. Designed and erected during a period which many historians consider to be the waning years of the Prairie movement, the Miller House affirms Van Bergen's mastery and confidence in this approach to architecture, which he retained throughout his professional career.

John Van Bergen gained his architectural training through on-the-job experience rather than academic study, a circumstance shared by many Prairie School architects. Their lack of formal training was considered an attribute rather than a liability in securing employment with progressive architects such as Sullivan and Wright. Born in Oak Park, Illinois in 1885, Van Bergen literally grew up amidst the emerging genius of Frank Lloyd Wright, whose distinctive designs began to dot the western suburb's streetscapes beginning in 1889. Van Bergen gained practical first-hand experience in building construction at an early age by assisting an uncle who operated a small contracting business in the western suburbs.



French doors in the living room (seen here) and dining room allow the adjacent porch to be treated as an extension of both spaces. *(Courtesy of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency)*

In Prairie designs the fireplace inglenook was seen as a feature reinforcing concepts of the family, and was therefore given special emphasis. In the Miller House the fireplace is of grey Roman brick, with massive stonework defining the opening of the hearth. *(Courtesy of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency)*



Perhaps no other architect of the Prairie School had as diverse an architectural training as Van Bergen, having gained his professional experience by working for three of the most famous practitioners of the movement, Walter Burley Griffin, Frank Lloyd Wright, and William Drummond. His first architectural position was with Walter Burley Griffin, a former Wright associate who had established his own practice in 1905 and went on to a distinguished career resulting in numerous commercial, residential, city planning and landscape commissions of individual distinction. Entering Griffin's office in January, 1907 as an inexperienced twenty-one year old novice, Van Bergen later acknowledged Griffin's role in his architectural training, writing in 1968 that Griffin was "a great teacher for me. He had no end of patience with a very poor draftsman and no university teacher could have been better for me." Van Bergen's employment with Griffin extended for over a year-and-a-half, until October, 1908 when a lack of commissions forced him to seek employment elsewhere.

After three months of tutoring at the Chicago Technical College, Van Bergen secured employment in January, 1909 at the Oak Park studio of Frank Lloyd Wright, where he had the opportunity to work on projects such as the Robie House in Chicago and the Gale House in Oak Park. When Wright unexpectedly closed his Oak Park practice later that year, Van Bergen found himself as one of the two remaining studio members responsible for completing unfinished projects in the office, ably demonstrating his largely self-taught skills in design and construction.

By mid-1910, Van Bergen began working for the third distinguished alumnus of the Wright Studio, William Drummond, and also assisted in works of the established Oak Park architect E.E. Roberts. In 1911, Van Bergen momentarily put aside his strongly held precepts of the organic principals of the Prairie School to satisfy the exam requirements for obtaining an architectural license, later recalling:

When I took the architectural examination at Urbana (three days of torture) "classical design" was a must if one wanted to pass. With little or no interest in said classical for our age in America, I somehow passed the examination and received my Illinois architectural license in 1911.

The beginning of Van Bergen's independent practice dates to 1912, and for the next decade his work evinced the varying influences of Griffin, Wright, and Drummond.

In the early 1920s Van Bergen began to design houses in Highland Park, and in 1927 he built his own home there. Apparently, the change in location, and possibly the influence of fellow Highland Park resident, landscape architect Jens Jensen, brought about more "naturalistic" variations of Prairie concepts by Van Bergen. Through 1950, Van Bergen made widespread use of such rustic materials as stratified limestone, redwood board-and-batten siding, and wood shakes while working within the basic Prairie idiom. In discussing

Van Bergen's early Prairie works, James Muggenberg, whose article on Van Bergen is the definitive piece on the architect, noted that "Van Bergen more often produced designs that either by materials selection, roof type, or detailing expressed the casual side of prairie architecture as would befit a residential structure." ("John Van Bergen: The Prairie Spirit into the Mid 20th Century," *Prairie School Review*, p.8). The description is applicable to Van Bergen's design outlook throughout his career. The stratified limestone veneers of his later work--most notably in Highland Park, Winnetka, and Wilmette--demonstrates the architect's commitment to indigenous designs, as formulated in his early Prairie works.

In addition to the Miller House, John Van Bergen designed three projects for sites in Chicago, two of which were built: the William Webster House (5730 North Sheridan Road, 1913, demolished) and the Chicago Yacht Club's Monroe Street Clubhouse (c. 1930-40, no longer discernable because of subsequent remodeling). The other project, for a pavilion and boathouse in Columbus Park (1920), was never built.

Van Bergen's strong sense of the ideals of the Prairie movement and his outlook toward the perpetual creation of an indigenous architecture, integral to time and place, was carried out consistently throughout an architectural career of more than sixty years. While many considered the period preceding World War I the waning years of the Prairie School as an architectural style, Van Bergen recognized that the movement was not a style at all, but rather a philosophical approach adaptable to the practice of architecture.

The Allan Miller is the only known structure designed by Prairie School architect John Van Bergen still standing in Chicago. (*Raymond T. Tatum, photographer, for Chicago Historic Resources Survey*)



SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brooks, H. Allen. *The Prairie School: Frank Lloyd Wright and His Midwest Contemporaries*. Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1972.
- Gutheim, Frederick, ed. *Frank Lloyd Wright on Architecture: Selected Writings, 1894-1940*. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1941.
- Hogan, Will. "South Shore." In *Local Community Fact Book, Chicago Metropolitan Area (Based on the 1970 and 1980 Censuses)*. Chicago Fact Book Consortium. Chicago: 1984.
- Muggenberg, James. "John Van Bergen: The Prairie Spirit into the Mid 20th century." *The Prairie School Review* 13 (1976): 5-24.
- Taub, Daniel and Jean Bacon. "Allan Miller House," *National Register of Historic Places, Inventory-Nomination Form*. United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1991.
- Van Bergen, John S., "A Plea for Americanism in our Architecture." *The Western Architect* 21 (1915): 24 *et seq.* (Reprinted in Brooks, H. Allen, ed. *Prairie School Architecture: Studies from 'The Western Architect'*. Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1975.)

Additional research material used in the preparation of this report is on file at the office of the Commission on Chicago Landmarks and is available to the public.

Staff for this Publication

Timothy Barton, *research and writing*
Janice Curtis, *production*